

# *"The Way of the Church"*

## *\*Continued\**

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*Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. (Jude 1:3 NASB)*

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Today, I hope to deliver the fourth and final message in the series concerning "The Church."

### **~The First Message~**

We started out several months ago with the history of the Newton Church of God (Seventh Day) which was started back in the 1930s by William and Lizzie Coulter; they were enlightened to Sabbath Keeping and the keeping the Commandments of God.

### **~The Second Message~**

We moved on from there to the message on "The Church of God," keying in on the verses in Ephesians chapter five. Eph 5:25b-27 NASB

*(25) just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,*

*(26) so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,*

*(27) that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.*

We also said that, "The church is one of the few aspects of Christian theology that can be observed and noted that it was one of several ways in which the church witnesses to Jesus Christ, which is simply by its existence."

We need a clear understanding of the church, so we can have a clear understanding of its relationship to Christ and all the other areas that it affects. And its understanding ultimately affects the way we view God and our relationship with Him. "Our relationship with God determines how we interact with Christ."

As an overview, we said that the church is a place to come into from the outside secular world, a place of refuge from the storms of life. It's the one place that we can be free, to worship God without any interference from the world.

We discussed three things about the church; “the people of the church,” “the church is the body of Christ” and last and not least, “the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit.”

(1) We are “the people” that make up the church; we are the believers that follow Jesus Christ, which is the one and only way to salvation and eternal life. The church is constituted of God’s people and they belong with Him and He belongs to them, it’s a union, it’s a marriage. So we are to be holy and without blemish.

*(27) that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. (Eph. 5:27)*

Since we are the church, the bride of Christ, we must be ready at all times. Christ could call for His Church at any moment. So, again I repeat, be ready!

(2) The church is the “body of Christ” and Christ is the head of this body of believers, known as the church. Col 1:18 NASB

*(18) He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.*

The church is Christ’s body and is used both of the church universal and of individual local congregations. In other words, in and of itself, each church is complete without the other churches and the true group of churches is complete in and of themselves.

(3) The “temple of the Holy Spirit” is the concept or the picture of the church. Paul refers to the spirit and the body in I Corinthians 12:13:

*(13) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. NASB*

We must remember the church is one foundation. Paul calls himself a wise architect because the foundation he laid was not different from the one eternally laid. How foolish an architect would be if he refused to follow the laws of nature and civil engineering which are actually the laws of God. You, too, are unwise if you diverge from the Church’s one foundation, which is “Jesus Christ and Him crucified,” laid down by God from the beginning.

### ~The Third Message~

I continued with part one of the third message, “The Way of the Church.” It was a message pointing out the culture of the church and how it is getting away from Biblical Principles. How the Word is watered down or down-right changed to suit whoever reads it and changes it into their own theology, not God’s.

There has been and will always be a chosen church, the true church of Jesus Christ. I’m not talking about a denomination or a particular church or a church building, for remember the true church is made up of what: “the people of God.” These are the group of believers that are following Jesus and keeping His commandments, the true church. Christ even calls them, “little flock,” in Luke 12:32;

(32) *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Luke 12:32 NASB*

Jesus Christ commanded His followers in Matthew 4:4 to use every Word of God, not just some of them, the ones you like and disregard the others.

(4) *But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" Matthew 4:4 NASB*

In this third message we also touched base on;

### ~The Secularization of the Church~

Secularization is the process by which a society becomes more and more distant from its Christian roots. The essence of secularization is the fact that the culture no longer depends upon Christian morals, principles, or practices. Remember, the true church is built upon Christ and His Word. “Nothing more and nothing less!” A thoroughly secularized church is the end results of a liberal theology. Liberal theology is defined as any belief or no belief at all. In short, believe what you may, its okay.

### ~Without a Preacher~

Or a better title may be a preacher without God’s Word. You may remember, one report said; Preaching of the Word of God is the chief means by which God conform Christians to the image of Christ. Rightly understood, true Christian preaching is not

aimed only at this earthly life, but is the means whereby God prepares His people for eternity. Continuing on with this report, it stated; “Many church goers expressed a desire to be entertained, rather than educated. The faithful preacher takes as his first and most sacred responsibility, the charge to give the congregation the preaching it needs, not the preaching or theology it wants.

### **~Apostate Pastors that don’t believe in God~**

Believe it or not, there are now many preachers in growing numbers in the pulpit today that do not even believe in God, and a number of them are atheists. The church bears the responsibility to make the issues clear and to defend the faith – otherwise it isn’t a church at all. This is the reason we have as well as most churches, a “statement of faith” so we and others will know where we stand on the issue of the Bible.

### **~Prosperity Theology – A False Gospel~**

According to the preachers of the prosperity gospel, you can get riches and rewards by having sufficient faith – and investing sufficient funds in the ministries of the prosperity preachers. The entire movement presents the Gospel as a message that is primarily about earthy rewards – a theology that turns God into a heavenly banker who is obligated to invest His people with material riches.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr. sums it up very well. He says, “In the end, the biggest problem with prosperity theology is not that it promises too much, but that it promises far too little. The Gospel of Jesus Christ offers salvation from sin, not a platform for earthly prosperity. While we should seek to understand what drives so many into this movement, we must never for a moment fail to see its message for what it is – a false and failed gospel.”

**Today I would like to continue with this forth in a series of messages titled; “The Way of the Church Continued.”**

*Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. (Jude 1:3 NASB)*

## # Churches Hear so Little of the Bible

There is impatience with the Word of God today in a number of churches. In an article in (Christianity Today) the author wrote, “It is well and good for the preacher to base his sermon on the Bible, but he better get to something relevant pretty quickly, or we start mentally to check out.” The writer, Pastor Mark Galli was told to cut down on the biblical references in his sermon. One staff member told him that he would lose people if he continued too long in the Bible. And that cutting down on Bible verses would save time and would better hold people’s interest.

In many churches there is very little reading of the Bible in worship, and sermons are marked by attention to the congregation’s concerns – not by an adequate attention to the biblical text. The exposition of the Bible has given way to the concerns, real or perceived, of the listeners. The authority of the Bible is swallowed up in the imposed authority of congregational concerns. Congregations expect the preacher to start from some text in the Bible, but then quickly move on “to things that really interest us.” Like.....ourselves? We want to fixate on our needs, our wants, our wishes and our hopes – at the expense of others and certainly at the expense of preaching Christ.

We catch a little light of preaching and church services in Nehemiah Eight.

Neh 8:1-8 NASB

- (1) *And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel.*
- (2) *Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.*
- (3) *He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.*
- (4) *Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his*

*right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand.*

*(5) Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.*

*(6) Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.*

*(7) Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place.*

*(8) They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.*

They read the scriptural text clearly, and then explained the meaning of the Scripture to the people. The congregation received the Word humbly, while standing. The pattern is profoundly easy to understand – the Bible was read and explained and received. The point of the sermon or reading was simple – “to make clear the reading of the Scriptures.”

Jesus himself read Scripture, as recorded in the book of Luke.

Luke 4:15-17 NASB

*(15) And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all.*

*(16) And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.*

*(17) And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,*

In many churches today, there is almost no public reading of the Word of God. Worship is filled with music, and congregations seem disinterested in listening to the reading of the Bible. Let me remind you, we all need the ministry of the Word of God.

The biblical formula is clear – the neglect of the Word of God can only lead to disaster, disobedience, and death. God will rescue the true church from error, and He

will preserve His Church and has during all these centuries. We witness only by His Word - not congregational self-study or friendly-seeking churches that compromise the Word of God for numbers. Jesus himself said; Mat 11:15 NASB (15) *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear.* Let us hear not any gospel, but the one and only Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **# Moralism is not the Gospel**

The Apostle Paul was shocked by what he had learned about the church in Galatia; that they had accepted or had started practicing a different gospel than he had originally preached to them. They had failed in the crucial test of discerning the authentic Gospel from its counterfeits. Paul wrote to them; *I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.* (Gal 1:6-7 NASB) We desperately need to hear and to heed this warning, even in today's churches. These false doctrines today, are no less subversive and seductive than those encountered and embraced by the Galatians.

One of the most seductive false gospels is moralism. The basic structure of moralism comes down to this – “the belief that the Gospel can be reduced to improvements in behavior.” It communicates to lost persons the message that what God desires for them and demands of them is to get their lives straight. We are never the less, forgetting about the main message and the first message, and mission of the Gospel, forgiveness and repentance. Jesus gives us the guidance and priority on the subject in Matthew 6; *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* (Mat 6:33 NASB)

Moralism leads us to believe that we can achieve righteousness by means of being raised right and proper behavior. But our communities are filled with people who have been “raised right” but are headed for hell. We cannot, let me repeat, we cannot achieve salvation by being good and on our best behavior. If we are promoting this in the church we are given over to moralistic messages, rather than the preaching of the Gospel.

There is a message that comes directly from the Apostle Paul when he insists that; *nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.* (Gal 2:16 NASB)

Moralism makes sense to sinners, for it is what they have been taught since early childhood; to be good, to act proper, and be nice to others. And there is nothing wrong with these qualities. But, moralism is not the Gospel, and “it will not save.” The only Gospel that saves is the “Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Paul continues in Galatians with his message; *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.* (Gal 4:4-5 NASB)

I want to be clear today, that we are justified by faith alone, saved by grace alone, and redeemed from our sin by Christ alone. The Gospel of Jesus Christ transforms sinners into adopted sons and daughters of God. We can now be in the family of God by this adoption. Moralism can only produce sinners who are better behaved.

The Apostle Paul insists that the law shows us our sin and makes clear our inadequacy and our total lack of righteousness. *Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.* (Gal 3:24 NASB) The church must never hide the law of God. “It reveals sinners!”

“Hell will be highly populated with those who were “raised right.”

### **# The Center of the Gospel**

Not sure who said it concerning the center of the Gospel, but their comments were; “ May the power of the cross and victory of the empty tomb fill every pulpit, every pew, and every Christian heart – and may the Good News of the Gospel be received with joy by sinners in need of a Savior.” How many here today believe that this is the center of the Gospel – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? The Apostle Paul affirms this priority in I Corinthians 15: *Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by*



*which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1Co 15:1-11 NASB)*

Paul is not concerned here with any other Gospel, only the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the only Gospel that saves. This is the Gospel I preached says Paul to the Corinthians. Paul is encouraging them to hold fast to the Word preached to them, not some other or any other Gospel. Folks, what Gospel are we referring to today, of course it's the Bible, the Holy Word of God, the one, the only true Gospel of Christ.

What are we to be preaching today, and of first importance? "That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures," and "that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." Yes, the cross and the empty tomb stand at the center of the Gospel. Without these, there is no good news and no salvation through Christ.

Just remember what Paul tells us in I Corinthians 15: *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.* (1Co 15:56-58 NASB)

### **# You Must Be Born Again**

*Nicodemus \*said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly,*

*truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'*

(John 3:4-7 NASB) Nicodemus was confused as many of us are. How can I be born again? The revolutionary character of the Gospel broke through old traditions and understandings. The new wine of the Gospel could not be contained in the old wineskins. (Mark 2:22) Jesus continued with Nicodemus, him being a teacher of the law and did not know this. (John 3:10) I think we all have a yearning in us to be born again. No matter how faint it may be! Put another way, there's that empty hole in each of us that only Jesus can fill!

The New York Times ran a story in 2008 that provides evidence that there is within the human heart a yearning to be born again. Half-way around the world we find a Buddhist temple that offers, for a small fee, an opportunity to die, rise up again, newborn and make a fresh start in life. Sound interesting?

The paper reports that nine big pink coffins dominate the grand hall of the temple and every day hundreds of people take their turns climbing in for a few moments, as monks chant a dirge. Then, at a command, the visitors clamber out again cleansed – they believe – of the past. There way of being born again. Not quiet what Jesus was referring to with Nicodemus.

Like Charlie Chaplin on an out-of-control assembly line, they follow the monks' commands: into the coffin, down on their backs, eyes closed, shroud on, shroud off, up on their feet, quick prayer and scramble out into a new life. These so-called "funerals for the living" are attracting so much attention, that a movie has been produced, -"The Coffin." Brings to mind Acts 17:27; *that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;* (Act 17:27 NASB) They were groping for God, or reaching with uncertainly.

Grope - To reach about uncertainly; feel one's way: - To search blindly or uncertainly.

One person that had been through the coffins six times said; when I went in I felt warm, and when I came out I felt released." As I lay there and listening to the chanting

of the monks, I felt relaxed, she said. When I got up, I was thinking of good things, thinking of the Buddha image in the hall. I felt good. This reminds me of that song I heard, "Looking for love in all the wrong places." Well, people are looking for salvation in all the wrong places. Christianity is not a feel good all the time religion.

## # The Only Way

Folks, let me tell you that there is only one way to eternal life and that is through Jesus Christ. The apostle John quoting what Jesus said in his gospel; Jesus \*said to him, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.* (John 14:6 NASB) *"I am the bread of life.* (John 6:48 NASB) *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.* (John 15:5 NASB) Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, *"I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."* (John 8:12 NASB) *"While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."* (John 9:5 NASB) So Jesus said to them again, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.* (John 10:7 NASB) *"I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.* (John 10:9 NASB) Jesus said to her, *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,* (John 11:25 NASB) *and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"* (John 11:26 NASB) Jesus said, "Do you believe this, do you believe that," "do you believe that I AM the great I AM." If you believe, then show me your fruit. Jesus is saying, if you believe me why are you not walking the walk and talking the talk.

The final question today is - Can others see Jesus in me and you daily, in or out of the Church setting? Are we walking the walk and talking the talk of Jesus Christ?



*I have gotten information for this article from a number of different sources; From God, internet, Bibles, dictionaries, and study materials from several different authors, etc. I do not take full credit for these writings since there are many. I did not in some cases keep up with this information in order to give proper credit. Credits will sometimes be in the above writing. My comments, writings and rewriting of the sources are in this article. I therefore cannot take full credit for this writing. The full credit would have to go to Jesus Christ, the creator of all things.*

*This article as well as many other messages can be found at [www.deweyfox.com](http://www.deweyfox.com) and click on "Christianity."*

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Dewey E. (Obed) Fox, Bond Servant of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

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